



To the Michigan Senate Committee on Local Government,

On September 7<sup>th</sup> of this year, State Senator Dale Zorn (R – Ida) introduced Senate Bill (SB) 1060. This legislation offered hope to thousands of student residents in the City of East Lansing who currently reside in poor housing stock that are unable to receive necessary improvements. Similarly to SB 1060, the House has a bill that was introduced by State Representative Lee Chatfield, H.B. 5041.

The newly elected Mayor Meadows of East Lansing introduced Ordinance 1361 to address the nonconforming issue back in November of last year. Within the December 1, 2015 minutes of the City of East Lansing's University Student Commission, which a member of our organization sat on and chaired, it is written that "the proposed ordinance does not change much" and would not allow for "significant structural changes." When asked why the City is opposed to nonconforming legislation, "Meadows stated that in general the City is opposed because the City should be allowed to fix it here and not the state."<sup>1</sup>

While our organization supported H.B. 5041 originally and wanted it to move forward in Committee, we came to the realization that the bill wouldn't move forward and now turn our attention and efforts to SB 1060. In December of 2015, our General Assembly, representing students of all colleges as well as the Council of Racial and Ethnic Students and the Council of Progressive Students, voted to increase accessibility to high-quality rental housing.<sup>2</sup> This became an issue our organization was not about to let go.

Doing as they said they wanted, the City of East Lansing formed a Nonconforming Ordinance Committee to make recommendations to the City Council on Ordinance 1361 and the nonconforming policy as a whole. In keeping with our dedication to this issue, a

<sup>1</sup> East Lansing University Student Commission December 1, 2015 Meeting Minutes.

<sup>2</sup> Associated Students of Michigan State University Bill No. 52-35, "A Resolution to: Increase Accessibility to High-Quality Rental Housing."



representative of our organization served as the only student appointed to this citizen steering committee. This individual, who had never worked in housing policy before, took it upon themselves to learn about the deeper issues involved and the complicating factors. They listened closely to what their fellow board members had to say, even when they made disparaging remarks about students, and contributed in the discussion when they believed it was necessary, which was often. Although the committee had to be extended until late May, our member voted on the discussed and compiled recommendations and submitted two pages of comments, which were published in the final report.<sup>3</sup>

Summer passed and the next action taken by the City was the introduction of Ordinances 1380, 1381, 1382, and 1383, which are all direct results of the Nonconforming Ordinance Committee's recommendations. While these four ordinances represent areas of compromise and agreement by the Committee, the simple truth is that they do not go far enough in allowing landlords the ability to update the properties in which thousands of Michigan State University students reside.

The City of East Lansing has had the opportunity to resolve the nonconforming ordinance issue in a manner that is fair and equal to all of its residents. Although there are provisions within these newly introduced ordinances that represent progress, they do not go far enough in guaranteeing students the ability to inhabit equally safe and updated housing as permanent residents of East Lansing. While it is an extreme word and we hesitate to use it, Ordinance 900 and subsequent housing policy within the City of East Lansing in a sense discriminates against the student population residing in residential rental houses. The City's policies are crafted to remove the nonconforming properties - remove the students, so conforming properties, -permanent residents, can replace them.

We agree with what Mayor Meadows said back in the December 1, 2015 University Student Commission meeting; it should be the City that decides City policy. However, it is evident that the City is either unable or unwilling to correct the current policy as it stands.

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<sup>3</sup> City of East Lansing's 2015 "Nonconforming Use Committee Report and Recommendations." May 31, 2016



The City has misused the function of statutorily defined nonconforming zoning for high concentrations of student housing. Thus, it is incumbent upon this Committee to take action on S.B. 1060 in order to provide students the opportunity to reside in homes that are as equally habitable and updated as those of permanent residents.

In closing, we pose a question to members of the Committee. If your daughter or son, or granddaughter or grandson, attended Michigan State University, would you want them to live in a community in which their landlord lacks the ability to make housing improvements to improve the overall quality of living, improvements permanent residents are allowed to make to their homes? This is why even though you represent districts from across the State, you should support S.B. 1060 and do what is within your power to advance it through this Legislature.

Respectfully,

The Associated Students of Michigan State University